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SUBJECT: ITALY: BERLUSCONI WINS ITALIAN ELECTIONS

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Classified By: Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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11. (C/NF) Former PM Silvio Berlusconi's coalition defeated center-left rival Walter Veltroni 46.8 to 37.4 in Italy's parliamentary elections, obtaining comfortable majorities in both houses of parliament. The populist, anti-immigrant Northern League, a Berlusconi ally, doubled its percentage to 8.3 percent. Former Berlusconi ally and centrist Pierferdinando Casini squeaked past the minimum threshold, but no communist parties will be represented in parliament. Veltroni congratulated Berlusconi early Monday on his victory in an unusual gesture of bipartisanship. Disillusioned with politics and the failures of the Prodi government, Italian voters will expect Berlusconi to deliver. On foreign policy, likely future PM Berlusconi is a proven close ally of the United States who will be working with a parliament mostly absent of knee-jerk anti-Americanism. END SUMMARY

BERLUSCONI WINS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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12. (U) CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES: Former PM Silvio Berlusconi's coalition won a comfortable 46.8 to 37.4 percent victory over Walter Veltroni's center-left coalition. Within Berlusconi's coalition, his own People of Liberty (PdL) won 37.4 percent, the Northern League 8.3 percent and the smaller Southern Autonomist Movement (MPA) 1.1 percent. The Center Left Democratic Party (PD) won 33.1 percent and Veltroni-ally, Italians of Value (IdV) 4.4 percent. Former Berlusconi ally and centrist Pierferdinando Casini (UDC) won 5.6 percent, reaching the 4 percent threshold for representation in parliament. For the first time in the history of the Italian Republic, no communist parties will be represented in parliament. Votes from abroad have not yet been tabulated, but Berlusconi will have at least a 54 percent majority in the Chamber.

13. (U) SENATE: Berlusconi exceeded expectations in the Italian Senate, winning an estimated 171 of 315 elected seats, not counting the six senators abroad. 162 senators are considered the minimum number of senators for a "political majority" in the Senate. Estimated Senate seats for all parties, not counting senators from abroad are: PdL 144, LN 25, MPA 2, PD 116, IdV 14, UDC 3, others 3.

14. (SBU) Voter participation was 80.4 percent, down four

percentage points from 2006 but within historical norms. The "anti-politic" non-voters likely caused losses for the far left and Veltroni's PD but with only a four percentage point drop in voter participation, it was not as significant a factor as the general rightward shift away from radical parties.

#### BERLUSCONI AND VELTRONI CONGRATULATE EACH OTHER

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15. (SBU) With results indicating a clear Berlusconi victory, Veltroni announced on Monday evening April 14 that he had called Berlusconi to congratulate him on his victory and to pledge to work with Berlusconi for the sake of Italy. Veltroni said that this gesture, very unusual in Italian politics, is "what every responsible Italian should be willing to do." Berlusconi publicly thanked Veltroni for the call and said he was open to cooperation with the opposition on a series of important reform packages.

#### COMMENTS ON THE NEW PARLIAMENT

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16. (C/NF) Three observations dominate post-election discussion:

REDUCED NUMBER OF PARTIES: Italians gave 73 percent of their vote to the two large blocks. Only eight parties will be represented in the new parliament, versus twenty in the outgoing one. For the first time since the 1990 corruption scandals decimated Italy's political class, and two large parties, the PdL and the PD, will represent the bulk of the majority and the opposition.

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE FAR LEFT: Italy's communist party was once the largest in Europe outside of the Soviet bloc and the largest Italian political party. This will be the first time

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in the history of the Italian Republic that it will not be represented in parliament. Though most centrists are happy to see the influence of the radical parties reduced, many worry that its remaining supporters will radicalize further in the absence of a voice in parliament.

STRENGTH OF THE NORTHERN LEAGUE: A Berlusconi ally, the populist, anti-immigrant, federalist LN of Umberto Bossi who brought down the first Berlusconi government in 1994, nearly doubled its vote compared to two years ago and will likely flex its muscles, as a result. The LN reportedly attracted many disillusioned working class voters with its anti-immigrant and populist rhetoric.

#### ECONOMIC REFORM AND FOREIGN POLICY

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17. (C/NF) During the campaign, both Berlusconi and Veltroni promised to slash the size and cost of government, raise pensions, lower taxes, and cut red tape for businesses and both have pledged to work together on institutional and electoral reform. On foreign policy, both pledged improved transatlantic relations and a commitment to work with EU partners, indicating the possibility of a first ever bipartisan foreign policy (REFTEL). In February 2007, 51 percent of the Senate voted in favor of Italy's military missions abroad. That number increased to 80 percent in February 2008, when coalition politics were no longer at play. 100 percent of the parties currently represented in the Italian parliament voted in favor of military missions abroad last February.

#### COMMENT

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18. (C/NF) Italian voters broke with tradition and eschewed Italy's numerous small political parties, delivering a

simplified political landscape. Italian voters, disillusioned with "politics as usual" and the failures of the Prodi government have given Berlusconi the majority he needs to deliver much-needed reforms, and will expect that he does so. The rise of the populist Northern League and the disappearance of the far left are evidence to that effect. The electoral outcome has delivered the best possible outcome for U.S. foreign policy interests. Not only is the likely future PM, Silvio Berlusconi, a proven close ally of the United States who shares President Bush's commitment to liberty and democracy but the new government will not have to deal with knee-jerk anti-American parties in parliament. Some objectives may still be difficult to achieve , but the tone and substance of the relationship is undoubtedly set to improve.

SPOGLI